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Chairperson: Ms. Intelmann ..... (Estonia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 53: Sustainable development

(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa
(A/61/225)

1. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (A/61/225, sect. II), drew attention to the fact that its main thrust was the outcome of the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in October 2005, and the celebration of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. On the subject of the Convention's collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), he said that at its session in December 2006, the Council of GEF would be considering the amendment of the GEF Instrument to reflect the designation of GEF as a financial mechanism of the Convention. The Conference of the Parties had adopted the Convention budget for the biennium 2006-2007, together with specific measures to reduce the risk of budget loss due to currency fluctuations.

2. The year 2006 marked not only the tenth anniversary of the Convention's entry into force but also the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, in honour of which there had been a number of major international events. The Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification in May-June 2006 had been attended by more than 100 participants from approximately 50 countries and had adopted a statement addressing the priorities for action, including water and resource management, food security, health and education. The International Conference on Youth and Desertification, held in Bamako, Mali, in September 2006, had called on Governments to ensure full involvement of young people in the management of natural resources and to make youth employment an urgent priority. A symposium, held in Almeria, Spain, in October 2006, had examined the link between land degradation, poverty and forced migration, which was becoming an increasingly topical and urgent issue worldwide.

3. Other events scheduled for the International Year were a round-table discussion, to be held in New York in November 2006, on identifying the challenges ahead and new and innovative approaches to dealing with them in order to enhance implementation of the Convention in a rapidly changing world; an international film festival, to be held in Rome in December 2006; and a forum to be held in Arusha, Tanzania, also in December 2006, at which the Convention and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) would be working together on linkages between climate change and desertification. He expressed his gratitude to the honorary spokespersons for the International Year for their support and encouragement.

4. At the suggestion of the Government of Argentina, the fifth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention had been deferred and would now be held in Buenos Aires from 7 to 22 March 2007. Its focus would be on implementation in regions other than Africa, and on selected global issues. In recent months, the secretariat of the Convention had been mobilizing assistance in elaborating national reports for countries from the Asian, Latin American and Caribbean, and Central and Eastern European regions. The GEF Council had made financial resources available to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide capacity-building for national progress reports on implementation of the Convention and awareness-raising efforts on sustainable land management in 90 countries in those regions. The World Bank and the Governments of Germany and Italy had also contributed.

5. The work programme of the fifth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention would have a two-pronged approach: review of implementation in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on information on the seven thematic issues identified by the Conference of the Parties; and consideration of selected issues that had global relevance, such as necessary adjustments to the elaboration process and the implementation of action programmes, mobilization and use of financial resources, promotion of the transfer of know-how and

technology, and procedures for communication of information. The session would submit a comprehensive report to the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Madrid in October 2007.

6. He was pleased to report that more and more developing countries were supporting implementation of the Convention, and sometimes with efforts that had not been witnessed before. He singled out the voluntary contribution of Venezuela in assisting implementation in the African, Asian (South Pacific), and Latin American and Caribbean regions. He said that never before had there been such a level of generosity from a developing country, and he encouraged other developing nations that had the possibilities to follow suit. The time had come to recognize that there would be no sustainable development on the planet unless full attention was paid to the Convention, which was an instrument whose implementation contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the other two sister Rio Conventions.

7. **Mr. González** (Venezuela) said that desertification was a global problem and should be addressed by the international community as a matter of urgency; if it was not reversed, agricultural production would be affected, causing malnutrition and hunger. The Convention played a significant role for his country in terms of its own policy instruments and international cooperation; Venezuela had given US$ 5 million in the past five years for the development of environmental recovery programmes in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

8. South-South cooperation would meet the needs of the countries of the South in terms of a strategy for development, better harnessing their synergies and allowing for improved management of natural resources. It was the developing countries that were most affected by the harmful consequences of environmental degradation, which were due to unbridled and unscrupulous industrial development. Venezuela called on developed countries to renew their commitment to the Convention, and underlined the importance of providing financial and logistical resources to ensure compliance with its provisions. All countries — and especially the developed countries — must meet their commitments to assign adequate resources for combating poverty, which would strengthen institution-building in developing countries and implement regional cooperation bodies under the Convention.

9. **Mr. Anadeu** (Nigeria) asked whether from the secretariat's point of view, satisfactory progress had been made towards making GEF a financial mechanism of the Convention. He also asked the secretariat to provide an explanation of what was meant by the Green Belt Initiative, as many of his colleagues from regions other than Africa did not know what it was.

10. **Mr. Idd** (Somalia) said that desertification was a global issue that called for partnership between developing and developed countries. His delegation had very serious concerns regarding the lack of resources provided to the Convention secretariat by the international community, but it welcomed what had been achieved with that low level of resources.

11. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), noting the comment made by the representative of Somalia, agreed with the representative of Venezuela that there was merit in urging developing countries to share their experiences — of whatever kind — with one another and to provide each other support. Some three years ago, the secretariat of the Convention had had discussions with Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, on sharing experiences in date palm cultivation with other developing countries, especially in Africa and Asia. The secretariat was grateful for the timely support of Venezuela, and hoped that it was the beginning of a trend in which other developing countries in a position to provide support, as well as developed countries and international organizations, would come forward to assist in the implementation of the Convention, either within existing frameworks or in other ways.

12. As for his views on the prospects for further cooperation with GEF, he told the representative of Nigeria that he believed that GEF now had a clear political mandate to provide support for implementation of the Convention, and that the GEF secretariat would be encouraged to move ahead in that area. Pending the availability of additional bilateral support, GEF should be asked to do more than it had been doing in the past. He was very optimistic that the implementing agencies, which had representation on the ground and knew exactly what was needed in the countries concerned, would help GEF to identify and implement activities that were within its mandate. He

was looking forward to the December 2006 meeting of the GEF Council, which would be considering the proposal to amend the GEF Instrument so as to reflect designation of GEF as a financing mechanism of the Convention.

13. As for the question concerning the Green Belt proposal, which had been submitted by the President of Nigeria and endorsed by the African Union, he explained that the idea behind the Initiative was to identify a number of complementary activities to help Africa meet the problems of land degradation head on. In Africa, combating desertification was the number one priority in the environment component of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). He was confident that the African Union would soon be in a position to submit to its partners the specific elements that could be used to implement the initiative.

14. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

15. **Ms. Zia** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that human and climatic factors combined were turning fertile soil into barren patches of land. There was widespread poverty in areas affected by desertification and land degradation. Despite the consensuses in Johannesburg that the Convention to Combat Desertification should be an important tool for poverty eradication, the international community still failed to pay sufficient attention to the problem. The Group of 77 and China were concerned that desertification had not been mentioned even once in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/61/1). The international community should make desertification a priority, particularly since 2006 had been designated the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (General Assembly resolution 58/211).

16. Greater efforts were required to mitigate the risks of desertification and serious droughts arising from poor land management, the impact of climate change and the loss of biodiversity. There was an urgent need for strategic guidance and targets in order to foster implementation of the Convention. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Convention stressed the need to "engage the international community in setting benchmarks and defining indicators for progress, and to make the Convention a centre of excellence in scientific and technical knowledge and best practices" (A/61/225, sect. II, para. 7). Greater access by the affected developing countries to financial resources and technology transfer would be crucial to the success of the Convention. GEF should be the financial mechanism for the Convention and should work with countries to build capacity that would facilitate their access to funding. Compliance with the Convention would support developing countries' efforts to eradicate poverty.

17. **Mr. Mbuende** (Namibia) said that for his country, implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification was a matter of life and death, since Namibia was home to both the Namib desert in the west and the Kalahari in the east, making it one of the driest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. His Government had to manage the country's fragile ecology while taking measures to curb desertification. High climatic variability and widespread deforestation, overgrazing and rangeland deterioration all posed risks of desertification. Those risks were exacerbated by illegal trade in desert plants.

18. Desertification had made the Namibian people more vulnerable to frequent droughts, which led to losses of stock and lower grain production. Droughts were especially devastating for the poorest farmers and rural communities, whose food security depended on rain-fed cereal crops. His Government was combating desertification by promoting the sustainable development of natural resources that were suited to the country's environment. Because all Namibians depended directly or indirectly on natural resources, the Government was working to safeguard those resources and implement its national development plans. To help restore the ecology, it supported communal land boards and promoted land-based livelihoods.

19. Integrated ecosystem management strategies were needed that would address the underlying causes of land degradation. Government ministries and non-governmental organizations were establishing a national programme known as the Country Pilot Partnership for Integrated Sustainable Land Management. GEF, which supported that programme, was doing an excellent job and should be given more resources.

20. Research and training were key components in combating desertification. Substantial resources had

been put into training on community-based natural resource management, which helped diversify livelihoods on marginal land. Promoting sustainable resource management at the community level would allow Namibia to combat desertification, reduce poverty and promote good governance. As part of that effort, the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre, which had been involved in community-based programmes and environmental research and education, had been transformed into a Southern African Development Community Centre of Excellence for training and research.

21. His delegation welcomed the close cooperation between the secretariats of the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Commission on Sustainable Development, which would facilitate coordination between them. He looked forward to the 2008 and 2009 sessions of the Commission, which would take up thematic clusters on agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification.

22. During the third GEF replenishment period, his Government had made good progress towards achieving some of the targets of multilateral environment agreements and the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the goal of ensuring environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, it still faced many challenges. Namibia was highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change, particularly in coastal areas. It also had to deal with the problem of its dependency on a fragile ecosystem and an economy based largely on subsistence agriculture and livestock production. GEF and its partners should develop accelerated approaches to climate change adaptation. It was disappointing therefore that the fourth replenishment round had not secured sufficient funds, while the number of projects had increased drastically. The General Assembly should support the new leadership of the Global Environment Facility to ensure its reform as an important funding mechanism.

23. Namibia noted with interest the call by GEF to adopt and begin implementing the Resource Allocation Framework for the focal areas of climate change and biodiversity. Every effort should be made, however, to ensure that such undertakings did not place additional burdens or limitations on developing countries. His Government's long-term plan depended on a partnership aimed at the wise use and management of environmental resources in the short, medium and long terms. The Resource Allocation Framework placed great emphasis on short-term planning, which was unsustainable and lacked strategic vision. Development partners should mobilize additional resources to support implementation of the Convention.

24. **Mr. Anadeu** (Nigeria) said that desertification was a particular problem in his country and region, but was also a global problem. His delegation therefore supported the secretariat's work on enhancing synergies between the Convention to Combat Desertification and other international conventions. GEF should be made the financial mechanism of the Convention.

25. His delegation appreciated the wide range and scope of activities carried out by the secretariat during the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. His Government had launched activities to enhance awareness of the issue and expand local capacities. Under a national framework to combat desertification, "economic trees" had been planted to increase reforestation. Local communities had been given incentives to enhance their economic well-being through tree-planting. "Green Belt" activities had been initiated across Africa through NEPAD.

26. Insufficient resources had been allocated for the projects already under way. Resources for sustainable land management must be increased. Desertification should be shown the same level of concern as the other conventions; it was not fair that 80 per cent of resources should go to two conventions while all the other conventions combined, including the one on desertification, received only 20 per cent of resources.

27. His delegation approved of the secretariat's review of the implementation of the Convention in Latin America. The reporting process that took place in African countries should be reproduced in other regions. International resources were needed in the form of both financial and technical assistance. Without such assistance, capacity could not be built. He hoped that adequate attention and resources would be devoted to the issue of desertification in 2007 and 2008.

28. **Mr. Mansour** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the international community should continue making the utmost efforts on the issues of desertification and land degradation by addressing their root causes and their impacts on development, poverty, deforestation, health, environmental sustainability, agriculture and even migration. It should consider the far-reaching

implications of desertification for sustainable development.

29. Although many governments as well as regional and international organizations were working on the problem of desertification, it was necessary to launch studies on the root causes and, in turn, the reciprocal impact of desertification on those causes. The global dimensions of desertification, including the incremental costs and global benefits of combating it, should also be examined. If that were to happen, the international community would mobilize more human and financial resources to address the problem.

30. Combating desertification was not the only way to deal with deserts. Coexisting with deserts was also a feasible way of life and should be part of the measures considered. Many lessons in that regard could be learned from the experiences of indigenous people and local communities, in other words, from people who lived in the desert and used natural resources in an environmentally sustainable manner. Much could be learned from the ways in which local communities managed scarce water resources from basin to consumption. Civil societies, including non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, the private sector, academics and the public should be engaged in raising awareness about the desert and combating desertification.

31. He called for greater involvement by organizations and agencies within the United Nations system, as well as scientific research and the transfer of appropriate, environmentally sound advanced technologies. Monitoring and early warning mechanisms should be established in deserts. The results of studies and monitoring activities, as well as measures for fixation of sand dunes, should be made available to people living in dry areas. Greater emphasis should be placed on formulating or implementing national action plans, while adequate and predictable financial resources should be allocated to support the implementation of those plans.

32. **Mr. Manor** (Israel) said that desertification, or land degradation in drylands, had emerged as one of the planet's most acute environmental problems. A decade after the inception of the Convention, it was time to evaluate the progress made. To that end, an international conference entitled "Deserts and Desertification: Challenges and Opportunities" would be convened in his country in early November 2006. The conference would emphasize the distinction between desert and desertification and would consider its technological policy and economic implications. The conference was meant to be relevant to scientists and government officials as well as practitioners and local communities based in drylands.

33. The first day of the conference would be dedicated to the challenge of sustainable living in drylands. On the second day, participants would explore the indirect causes of desertification as well as their interaction with the direct biophysical causes. The third day would be devoted to field trips to communities that had attempted to derive economic benefits from desert conditions, and on the final day, participants would consider the practical aspects of projects designed to provide sustainable livelihoods in drylands or to combat desertification.

34. **Mr. Seyni** (Niger) said that his country was particularly concerned about desertification, given that it was a landlocked country two thirds of whose surface was arid or desert land. Official statistics showed that the Niger lost some 100,000 hectares of forest annually due to drought and firewood collection. Loss of natural resources and soil degradation ensued, leading in turn to lower productivity, food insecurity and poverty. To cope with the effects of desertification, his Government had developed national plans and programmes aimed at combating desertification, managing and protecting natural resources and achieving sustainable development. It had created a National Environmental Council for Sustainable Development to implement the national plan on sustainable development and the environment, focusing on land restoration and conservation, integrated management of water resources, capacity-building in monitoring desertification and drought, public involvement, strong partnerships and a long-term vision for tackling environmental problems.

35. The country's national independence day had also been declared a national arbour day on which people across the country planted trees. The Government had plans to use the country's rich coal deposits not only to produce electricity but also to substitute for wood as a household energy source. Pilot projects for land recovery had already had some success and were being extended and intensified.

36. Nevertheless, the Niger was not able to combat desertification on its own; greater international

cooperation was crucial. His Government was grateful for the help it received through the bilateral, regional and international agreements it had signed, but also made an urgent appeal to the international community, and developed countries in particular, to lend greater support to its efforts to combat desertification. Without that support, the Niger could not hope to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals and objectives.

37. **Mr. Wang** Qi (China) said that desertification was the common responsibility of the international community and posed a long-term challenge to developing countries. Financial and technological input was indispensable to the task of combating desertification and implementing the Convention. From a global perspective, mechanisms for technological transfer should be actively pursued in order to facilitate the implementation of the Convention. The fight against desertification also called for all stakeholders to fulfil their respective roles and responsibilities. Governments should formulate appropriate policies and legislation, and private sector initiative should muster the necessary level of financial and technological support.

38. China was among the countries most seriously affected by desertification, and the Government had adopted a series of measures to implement the Convention. While some success had been achieved in curbing the expansion of deserts, resulting in economic and social development and the improvement of the environment, approximately 27.5 per cent of China's total land area was still affected by desertification. The Government would intensify its efforts to channel financial input into preventive measures and ecological construction. The scale and quality of national efforts would be enhanced by placing greater focus on the integrated use of scientific means and legislative measures, as well as broader national participation and expanded international cooperation.

39. China had shared the benefit of its experience in combating desertification through the training of technicians from developing countries, and had hosted an international conference on women and desertification.

40. **Mr. Ito** (Japan) said that, among other things, Japan had hosted an international symposium on desertification in response to the call on States to undertake special initiatives in observance of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. The symposium on drylands had concluded that comprehensive research was urgently needed, and stressed the importance of an integrated approach to combating desertification — one that included socio-economic policies, such as health and sanitation, and made use of the full range of climate- and biology-related data available. Japan had designed a website on the International Year of Deserts and Desertification to help raise public awareness of global desertification issues.

41. He expressed appreciation to Mr. Diello for his tribute to the late Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister of Japan and Honorary Spokesman for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, and to Member States for their efforts to combat the phenomenon. Lastly, he urged the international community to redouble its efforts to halt the progress of desertification and the threat to human security that it created.

42. **Mr. Silva** (Cape Verde) pointed out that poverty was a cause and consequence of desertification, and that halting land degradation would be crucial to poverty eradication. His delegation therefore remained puzzled by the discrepancy between the scope of desertification and the resources allocated to it. Desertification simply did not attract a level of attention commensurate with its negative social and economic and environmental consequences. He therefore welcomed the upcoming round-table discussions that were aimed at identifying innovative solutions to enhancing the implementation of the Convention within policy frameworks such as NEPAD. In Africa, the disruptive effects of drought and desertification were becoming apparent in areas such as forced migration, health and conflict.

43. The African countries were doing their utmost to solve their problems, but could not make further progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals without continued international support. He echoed the appeal to GEF to ensure the equitable distribution of greater resources to land degradation issues, and urged the Convention secretariat to create additional synergies with other Rio Convention secretariats, GEF and other international organizations and agencies.

44. Cape Verde welcomed the offers by Algeria and Israel to host international events to commemorate the

International Year of Deserts and Desertification, and all other initiatives taken by member States. At the national level, the Government and civil society of Cape Verde had organized a number of activities, including workshops and seminars.

45. **Mr. Mofadal** (Sudan) said that, even though desertification had been recognized as a major economic, social and environmental problem since 1977 and despite the efforts made since the signing of the Convention, desertification was still a source of great concern, particularly in Africa. His delegation appreciated the decision by the Conference of the Parties to establish an ad hoc intergovernmental intersessional working group to study the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and prepare a 10-year strategic plan to enhance implementation of the Convention, as it would indeed help enhance international efforts to address the diverse challenges of desertification in a concerted manner.

46. The Sudan had been suffering from drought and desertification for over three decades. The total area of forests — over a third of the country in the 1950s — had been progressively shrinking. The rate of deforestation and desertification was almost 29 times the rate of forestation. Many of those forests had been depleted to meet the growing demand for fuelwood, timber and agricultural land. The problem had been further exacerbated by rapid population growth, declining economic growth, civil war, the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries and growing livestock numbers. The spread of poverty and weak utilization of environmentally-friendly energy sources also played a significant role.

47. Since 1976, the country had been formulating national programmes to address drought and desertification. The Quarter Century Development Strategy (2002-2027) linked desertification to poverty, food insecurity and environmental degradation. Natural resource development focused on soil conservation and increasing forested areas, while the strategy on the use of energy sources was based on environmental conservation, economic and efficient energy use, and alternative and renewable energy sources.

48. At the regional level, the Sudan was a founding member of the organization now known as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which was tasked with enhancing regional cooperation on food security and environmental protection, economic cooperation, and political and humanitarian affairs. The efforts of IGAD and its partners had culminated in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which had been motivated by the conviction that peace was the first step to combating drought and desertification.

49. One of the lessons learned by IGAD was that drought and desertification could not be addressed effectively in isolation from other economic, social and political factors. Addressing the root causes of underdevelopment was essential to combating drought and desertification in developing countries. The efforts of the secretariat of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties, the Commission on Sustainable Development and other stakeholders — while appreciated — would be most effective if part of a comprehensive holistic approach that addressed obstacles to sustainable development at all levels. Another lesson learned by IGAD was that regional and subregional organizations could play a significant role in solving the problems of their respective regions if they were supported by other stakeholders in the international community.

50. **Ms. von Lilien-Waldau** (International Fund for Agricultural Development), speaking on behalf also of the Global Mechanism of the Convention, said that one fifth of the world's population and over 100 countries were affected by desertification and land degradation, which, according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, was one of the most critical problems affecting ecosystems today. The fate of poor communities and fragile drylands were intimately interrelated, with poverty being a cause and consequence of land degradation and desertification. Global goals for poverty reduction and environmental goods could be reached only by addressing desertification more rigorously. Recognizing that, the Heads of State and Government gathered at the 2005 World Summit had unanimously called for implementation of the Convention to be strengthened.

51. While the challenges loomed large, IFAD, particularly through its collaboration with the Global Mechanism and GEF, was committed to building on existing momentum to help bring to scale the response needed to achieve lasting results for the people living with the threat or reality of desertification. Approximately 70 per cent of IFAD-supported projects were located in ecologically fragile environments. The Fund's position was further reinforced through its status as a GEF Executing Agency, and as host of the

Global Mechanism, which had sharpened its focus on land degradation and significantly increased resources for the Convention's implementation.

52. IFAD had invested over $3.5 billion in areas affected by land degradation. Around 7 per cent of its lending programme was spent on land degradation activities directly linked to national action programmes under the Convention. The Fund's collaboration with the Global Mechanism had been instrumental in leveraging additional funding from GEF and other co-financing sources. The Fund strongly affirmed the Global Mechanism's role in overall resource mobilization for the implementation of the Convention.

53. According to a recent IFAD/Global Mechanism review, the share of IFAD programmes and projects that related to the Convention's objectives had increased from 34 per cent to 55 per cent between 2002 and 2004. Continuing collaboration between IFAD and the Global Mechanism was expected to lead to further mainstreaming of the Convention in IFAD programmes, better reporting of Convention-related activities and more effective replication.

54. The Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification had been a particularly important event for the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. IFAD supported the recommendations adopted at the Conference and encouraged their timely implementation. Based on its experience, IFAD would encourage broader and more significant support for the Convention's commitment to strengthen the role of women at all levels of implementation. In that regard, a publication on gender and desertification had been made available for Committee members.

55. Efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought were more urgent than ever. Recalling the decision by the Conference of the Parties to establish an ad hoc intergovernmental intersessional working group to develop a 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention, she said that that plan must build on lessons learned and experience gained in the 10 years since the Convention's adoption. When developing the plan, account should also be taken of the following useful insights of the recent IFAD/Global Mechanism review: the Convention's objectives should be mainstreamed in national and regional development and poverty reduction strategies; the mainstreaming of sustainable land management at the country level should include a strengthening of the voice and capacity of affected communities and ensure that their engagement was sustained over the long term; a better understanding was needed of the interrelationship between desertification and vulnerability; much more should be done to promote synergies between national strategic frameworks and the Rio Conventions; and reporting needed to be improved significantly.

56. The Convention's emphasis on grass-roots initiatives set it apart from other international treaties. The role of Governments, donors and development agencies was to identify partnerships and mobilize resources to link the rural poor with the tools they needed to prosper, thereby enabling them to build lives characterized by dignity instead of deprivation. Both IFAD and the Global Mechanism were committed to the Convention and would continue to work with their partners to achieve its goals.

Agenda item 57: Eradication of poverty and other development issues

(b) Industrial development cooperation (A/61/305)

57. **Mr. Yumkella** (Director-General, United Nations Industrial Development Organization) said that, since its establishment in 1966, UNIDO had evolved into a more effective and responsive organization. As part of its far-reaching programme of reform and revitalization, in place since the mid-1990s, UNIDO had cut its staff from 1,400 to around 700, while raising its technical cooperation delivery from $57 million in 1998 to $128 million in 2005. Moreover, it had closely aligned its programmes and activities with internationally agreed development goals; sharpened the focus of its work in selected areas of its core expertise; improved its delivery modality through integrated packages of services; promoted innovative partnerships and joint programmes with an increasing number of United Nations organizations and other development partners; and pioneered a new approach to field representation and collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to promote greater coherence at the country level. Those positive changes had been noted by UNIDO member States, the General Assembly, in its resolution 59/249, and by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, which, in an independent study of 23 international organizations conducted in 2004, had ranked UNIDO sixth overall and first in the group of five specialized agencies.

58. Turning to his report (contained in A/61/305), he said that there was encouraging and less encouraging news in today's global industrial landscape. On the positive side, he mentioned developing countries' share of global manufacturing (about one quarter) and global trade in manufactures (around one third); the steady growth in South-South trade in commodities and manufactures; and the industrial landscape's gradual shift towards a new pattern of global interdependence along the traditional North-South axis and, increasingly, a South-South axis. On the less positive side, he mentioned sub-Saharan Africa's very small share in world industrial output; its declining share in South-South manufactured exports, total exports, and medium- and high-technology exports; and the slow pace of growth in intraregional trade. The countries that had been most successful in raising incomes and reducing poverty — China and the newly industrialized countries — offered a good example of how to move ahead. They had significantly increased their manufacturing value added and developed into global players in trade in manufactured goods.

59. Notwithstanding its importance to poverty eradication, rapid economic growth brought with it social and environmental costs. The major challenges posed by widening income inequalities, regional disparities, urban migration, strains on social services, natural resource depletion and environmental degradation needed to be addressed if economic growth was to be sustainable and political stability secured. For UNIDO, the key to sustainable wealth creation was a pro-poor growth strategy, as described in the report (para. 16). The report also gave details on how UNIDO was contributing to that strategy through its support programmes for private sector development (para. 44).

60. In the past year, he had engaged directly with Government leaders and private sector development experts in almost every region. The issues under discussion today were particularly important for countries in crisis or recovering from crisis. Some of those countries had high numbers of unemployed youth who desperately needed a decent job. The international community must accept that poverty alleviation was not possible without wealth creation, through the establishment of a strong private sector. From his conversations, he sensed that Africa wanted to go beyond assistance and be part of the global trading system. Discussions about poverty therefore needed to focus less on basket weaving and more on enterprises that could supply baskets on a large scale, while discussions about health, in particular malaria, needed to look at how to help African countries add value to their cotton by producing mosquito nets themselves, rather than buying them from elsewhere. One African Minister had told him that Africans were no longer content with being taught how to fish; they wanted to learn how to make the fishing rod itself. That capacity to apply science and technology to productive activities was key to making poor countries a real part of the global value chain.

61. Returning to the issue of job creation for young people, he said that 15- to 24-year-olds accounted for only about a quarter of the working-age population, but nearly half of the world's unemployed. For various reasons, they were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to finding a job, particularly in developing countries. UNIDO was, therefore, teaming up with the African Union, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa, the Youth Employment Network and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to forge a concerted and coordinated approach to youth employment, particularly in West Africa.

62. UNIDO activities in the field of rural energy, such as the Initiative on Rural Energy for Productive Use or the partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the area of biofuels were aimed at creating employment and generating income, while reducing emissions, deforestation, land degradation and pollution. The September 2006 Iberian Ministerial Meeting on energy security in the Latin American region — organized by UNIDO, in cooperation with the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB) and Uruguay's Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining — had led to the establishment of a Regional Observatory for Renewable Energy, which would promote information-sharing on energy matters and develop projects and programmes in the field. It was hoped that in 2007 Brazil would host a conference on renewable energies and Malaysia would convene a meeting on palm oil-based biofuel.

63. UNIDO also gave small- and medium-scale industries advice and assistance on cleaner production methods, assisting industries in reducing water withdrawals and pollution and promoting water reuse and recycling, and offering integrated management programmes for marine ecosystems. Most of those

programmes were financed by GEF and conducted in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNDP.

64. UNIDO — one of the leading agencies for the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and conventions — had become the second largest United Nations agency for the implementation of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and had been entrusted with a significant share of national implementation plans under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. It currently assisted some 40 States, including China and India.

65. Another major challenge was how to make trade work better for the poor. The fact that many countries had failed to reap significant benefits from the new opportunities offered by the global trading system was not always due to tariff and non-tariff barriers. Other factors included lack of productive capacity, inability to prove conformity with international standards and the problems faced when integrating into the multilateral trading system. Developing countries currently had to meet over 100,000 product and process standards in order to access foreign markets. UNIDO had received and continued to receive significant support in that regard from the European Commission and individual European Union member States.

66. South-South cooperation also presented a great opportunity for sharing experiences. Countries that had made significant progress on poverty alleviation had done so through a strong push for private sector development, trade and technology transfer. Such experiences were relevant for other regions. For that reason, UNIDO had embarked on a South-South industrial cooperation initiative, which had already received $6.5 million from China and India and indications of support from other emerging economies such as Brazil. Malaysia's palm oil biofuel initiative, for example, was particularly relevant to West Africa, where palm oil originated. The only difference between them was that Malaysia had successfully applied science and technology to produce palm oil products that could now be exported to the rest of the world.

67. As noted in the report (para. 75), UNIDO also work closely with NEPAD, where the focus was on productive capacity. It was important to look beyond trade preferences. Countries needed the capacity to produce products in the right quantity, of the right quality and at a competitive price in order to effectively engage in the global trading system. That was the way to genuinely address poverty alleviation.

68. In its 40 years of existence, UNIDO had learned that it was important to remain relevant and responsive to the new realities and requirements of its member States. By bearing that lesson in mind, UNIDO hoped to continue serving them in the years ahead.

Agenda item 118: Programme planning (A/61/6 (Prog.7), A/61/16 and A/C.2/61/5)

69. **The Chairperson** recalled that the General Assembly, at its second plenary meeting, had allocated the current agenda item to all the Main Committees and to the plenary. In a letter dated 12 October, the President of the General Assembly had drawn his attention to the recommendation made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, in paragraph 120 of its report (A/61/16), to allocate subprogramme 1 of programme 7, Economic and Social Affairs, of the proposed strategic framework for the period 2008-2009 to the Second Committee for its review and action under the agenda item entitled "Programme planning".

70. **Ms. Pliner** (Secretary of the Committee) explained that the Chairperson of the Second Committee would inform the Fifth Committee that the Second Committee had examined the relevant parts of the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination in substantive terms, and had approved the recommendations contained in the report. If applicable, additional comments made by delegations would be included.

71. **Mr. Mally** (United States) said that his delegation had disassociated itself from the final report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination in September 2006 because of that Committee's continued inability to fulfil its mandate by reforming its working methods. His delegation was therefore not in a position to endorse the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.